Food Ministers Consider Food Labelling Review

The twelfth meeting of the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council (Ministerial Council) was held in Adelaide today, chaired by Jan McLucas, Parliamentary Secretary to the Australian Government Minister for Health and Ageing.

The Ministerial Council comprises Ministers responsible for food issues in Australia and New Zealand. At the meeting today, the Ministerial Council considered a number of strategic policy and food standards issues including:

Comprehensive Review of Food Labelling Law and Policy
The meeting agreed in principle to commission an independent, comprehensive review of food labelling law and policy. The review will be undertaken by an independent expert panel. The expert panel will comprise prominent individuals appointed by the Ministerial Council who collectively possess knowledge and expertise in the fields of public health, regulatory, economics/public policy, law and consumer behaviour and business. The review is to be chaired by an independent public policy expert.

Front of Pack Labelling
The Ministerial Council received a report from the Food Regulation Standing Committee (FRSC) on front of pack labelling of food that provides consumers with easily accessible information on the health status of the contents. The Ministerial Council had asked for an investigation on whether a front of pack (FOP) labelling scheme would be an effective health strategy to guide consumer choice towards healthier food options. The meeting agreed that FRSC provide a draft ministerial policy guideline to ministers at their next meeting in May 2009. The Chair, Senator McLucas, will write to the Australian Health Ministers Conference (AHMC) to seek their input into this review.

National food incident response protocol
The Ministerial Council endorsed the revised National Food Incident Response Protocol (the Protocol). The updated Protocol was updated to ensure an effective system for the consistent management of national food incidents. Under the revised protocol FSANZ is the Central Notification Point and agency responsible for coordinating national food incident responses.
Trans fatty acids in the Australian and New Zealand food supply
The Ministerial Council agreed that the trans fatty acids survey, currently coordinated by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), should include dietary intake assessment based on the latest results on the National Children’s Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey. FRSC is to report back on the survey results and provide a progress report on the voluntary initiatives by industry to reduce trans-fat intake to the Ministerial Council at its next meeting.

Food colouring
The Ministerial Council noted FSANZ’s efforts in monitoring and researching issues in relation to food colours and requested to be kept informed.

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